

FTC FACTS for Consumers

Consider the Alternatives:

Alternative Fueled Vehicles and Alternative Vehicle Fuels



Driving a car fueled by something other than gasoline or diesel fuel is no longer the stuff of science fiction. In addition to conventional gasoline and diesel fuel, reformulated — cleaner — gasoline and alternative fuels now are sold in many parts of the country. Alternative fuels such as methanol, ethanol, compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, and electricity produce fewer tail pipe pollutants than conventional gasoline and diesel fuel. Using them could improve our air quality.

In 1992, Congress passed the Energy Policy Act to promote the use of alternative fuels. For example, the law requires owners of fleet vehicles to purchase a certain number of alternative fueled vehicles. Congress also directed the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to issue labeling requirements for alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles. Two FTC Rules — the Alternative Fuels and Vehicles (AFV) Rule and the Fuel Rating Rule — require fuel dispensers and alternative fueled vehicles to be labeled with information to help consumers make knowledgeable decisions when it comes to filling up or buying a vehicle. The AFV Rule applies to new and used alternative fueled vehicles that are sold to consumers or leased to consumers for a minimum of 120 days.

This brochure explains the labels you'll see on alternative fueled vehicles and alternative fuel dispensers, and suggests several important factors to consider as you investigate the options.

Alternative Fueled Vehicles

AFVs are vehicles that operate on alternative fuels, such as methanol, ethanol, compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, electricity, and others designated by the U.S. Department of Energy. Some AFVs can run on conventional fuels, such as gasoline, *and* alternative fuels. They are called dual-fueled vehicles.

The required labels must be placed in plain view on the surface of all new and used AFVs. The labels on new AFVs must include the vehicle's cruising range as estimated by the manufacturer and its environmental impact, as well as general descriptive information. It's important to know how many miles your new AFV will travel on a supply of fuel because, gallon for gallon, some AFVs don't travel as far as gasoline-powered vehicles. The label's description of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) emission standard for the vehicle tells you to what extent the vehicle produces emissions. If a vehicle meets an EPA emissions standard, a box on the label will be marked and a caret (^) will be placed above the particular vehicle's certification standard. The label shows the levels of emissions standards in a series of boxes that range from a "Tier 1" vehicle — one with more emissions — to a "ZEV" — a zero emissions vehicle.

The labels on new and used AFVs also advise consumers to consider the following items before buying or leasing an AFV.

- **Fuel type.** Ask what kind of fuel powers the vehicle.
- **Operating costs.** Fuel and maintenance costs for AFVs may differ from gasoline or diesel-fueled vehicles.

- **Performance/convenience.** Vehicles powered by different fuels vary in their ability to start when they are cold; their acceleration rates; the time it takes to completely refill the vehicle's tank; and how they are refueled.
- **Fuel availability.** Find out whether refueling or recharging facilities are available in your area for the fuel the vehicle uses.
- **Energy security/renewability.** Consider where and how the fuel powering the vehicle is produced so you can anticipate long-term fuel availability at a reasonable price.

These labels also must include additional sources of information from the federal government: The Department of Energy maintains a toll-free National Alternative Fuels Hotline to answer questions about alternative fuels, give information about the availability of alternative fuels in a particular area, and suggest more sources of information about alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's toll-free hotline offers information about safety related automobile issues.

In addition, because all vehicles affect the environment directly (tailpipe emissions) and indirectly (how the fuel is produced and brought to market), the labels on used AFVs advise consumers to compare the environmental costs of driving an AFV to driving a gasoline-powered vehicle.

Alternative Fuels

Among the fuels covered by the Fuel Rating Rule and the Alternative Fuels and Vehicles

Rule are methanol, ethanol, natural gas, liquefied petroleum gases, hydrogen, coal derived liquid fuels, and electricity. For example, methanol is an odorless, clear liquid produced from natural gas, coal, or biomass resources, such as crop and forest residues. It usually is sold as a blend of 85 percent methanol and 15 percent gasoline. Ethanol, a liquid produced from grain or agricultural waste, usually is sold as a blend of 85 percent denatured ethanol and 15 percent gasoline.

The labels for these fuels are orange to distinguish them from gasoline octane labels, which are yellow. They must be placed on the fuel dispenser so that they are fully visible to consumers.

Gasoline labels tell you the octane rating. Alternative fuel labels describe the fuel and its principal component(s). The rating for an alternative fuel — other than electricity — is the commonly used name of the fuel and the amount of its principal component, expressed as a minimum percentage. For electric vehicle fuel dispensing systems, the fuel rating is a common identifier — such as electricity — and the system's kilowatt capacity, voltage, whether the voltage is alternating or direct current, amperage, and whether the system is conductive or inductive.

Consider the Alternatives

Why consider switching to alternative fueled vehicles or alternative fuels? According to the Department of Energy, emissions from the 200 million cars and trucks on U.S. roads — mostly hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, and carbon monoxide — account for about 50 percent of all

air pollution and more than 80 percent of urban air pollution. Driving alternative fueled vehicles could reduce the level of vehicle emissions, and choosing domestically produced alternative fuels — instead of imported oil — could help reduce the trade deficit, create jobs, and promote economic activity.

At the same time, you should be aware that some alternative fuels have a lower energy content than gasoline. On a gallon for gallon basis, some do not allow consumers to travel as many miles as they could in a vehicle powered with gasoline or diesel fuel. In addition, an AFV may cost more than a comparable gasoline-powered vehicle.

The good news is that you can help reduce pollution from vehicle emissions even if you don't choose an AFV or alternative fuel. If you live or work in an area where air pollution is a continuing problem, you may be able to find reformulated gasoline at local service stations. Reformulated gasoline is conventional gasoline with added oxygen. It burns more cleanly than conventional gasoline. It is required in areas with the most serious levels of ozone air pollution and is being used by choice in others.

For More Information

The Energy Policy Act of 1992 gave the Department of Energy primary responsibility for telling the public about alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles and promoting their use. Call DOE's toll-free National Alternative Fuels Hotline, 1-800-423-1DOE, for *Taking an Alternative Route*, a publication that provides more information about alternative fuels and alternative fueled vehicles, or visit DOE's

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Alternative Fuels Data Center website at www.afdc.doe.gov. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's toll-free hotline is 1-800-424-9393. For additional information about vehicle safety, visit NHTSA's website at www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide

information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP, or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.



Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Consumer and Business Education

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